

MILTON BARNES to RHODA BARNES

NOTE: The 97th Ohio remained at Blair's Cross Roads from mid-December through mid-January, subsisting off the surrounding country. Milton blames these hardships, including the failures in mail delivery, on the incompetence of the military Department of the Ohio which controlled Burnside's Army of the Ohio. Evidently the Regiment was unable to secure special War Department permission to enlist as a "veteran<sup>er</sup> regiment," which would have entitled them to some home leave, since it is not on the list of such regiments reported by General Thomas on January 1, 1864, "Dr Stewart" is Dr T.A. Stewart, one of four assistant surgeons of the 97th Ohio.

Camp on the Holston river 25

miles above Knoxville, Tenn

Dec. 24th 1863.

My Love,

Once more I am going to try to write to you under difficulties as usual. I wish dear Rhoda you could only realize the the [sic] circumstances under which I have to write. Then I know you would surely not wonder I dont write better and oftener. I have no nice table &c. to sit down to, but just have to snatch a moment down on the ground by our rude camp fire, with the buzzing crowd of soldiers around me. Sometimes I do wish I could once more find a quiet retired spot where undisturbed I might seat myself and concentrate my wandering thoughts and put my thoughts on paper just as I would love to tell them to you if I were by your side in [the] capacity of speaker and you the listener. but it is seldom I can find such a time and such a place. I have written to you a number of times since I arrived in this Department [of the Ohio] but generally it has only been a few random pencil marks to assure you of my welfare, and send it off in a hurry without any assurance that even they would ever reach you. Such is the looseness of the mail arrangement and every other arrangement in this department that we have all long since voted the army

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of the Ohio with headquarters at Knoxville one grand humbug - but here we are and in the patience of hope we will possess our souls until something turns up to relieve us. One thing I have been very fortunate in, that is I have all your letters up to Dec. 18th [-] about a week ago. The first mail we received, I got three letters and O such good nice kind ones. they covered all the ground necessary to my satisfaction and I went to bed after reading and re-reading them feeling happy and perfectly contented so far as the soldier's content can go when away, far away from those he holds so dear! and then yesterday Dr. Stewart came up from Chattanooga with another mail and I received still another of Dec. 18th You complain a little that I dont write about what you say in your letters. O dont blame me my dear, for just now while I am trying to write with the Adjutant's pen & a borrowed sheet of his paper he is hurrying me to write himself as the orderly goes with the mail in a few minutes, and forty things are to be said and done. I wish I could only get you to understand what difficulties I labor under and then you would not blame me. It is not like we used to have it when in a regular camp. then we could have some conveniences, but here we have none at all. The Col. [✱] Adjutant and I have been eating off the same plate nearly ever since we left Chat. [sic] and a part of the time drinking out of the same tin cup of coffee. I tried all over Knoxville to buy a plate, or cup, or indeed any kind of eating utensil [but] could get nothing, not even a water bucket, nor even an old waste tin can - no nothing. I dont mention these things my dear with any spirit of complaint or murmuring but only to show you the utter absence of every convenience in the army, while on an expedition of this kind. We got some army

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blankets the other day so that we are not now suffering from cold, and we have enough to eat, by foraging a little, and eating a good deal of dirt. we have been changing camp every few days. it isn't much trouble to move, and when we burn all the timber out of one piece of woods, we change to another and whack away again, throw up shelters of brush wood to keep the storms off, build large fires, talk, laugh, tell stories &c, and <sup>[try to]</sup> be just as happy as the circumstances will permit. Sam is trying to get the regiment to enlist as veterans and I believe nearly all will go into it if they can get a furlough home. but not having been <sup>[service]</sup> in two years, we are not admissible under the law for veterans, unless we can get a special permit from the War Dept. which he has gone to Knoxville to try to get by telegraph. I dont think he will succeed but I am perfectly willing as that will ensure us a furlough home for 30 days to recruit and you know how these recruiting furloughs do hold out. I would be willing to serve another year for the sake of getting home to stay until the first of April, would'nt you Rhoda <sup>[?]</sup> Dear but then I don't think it would increase our term of service at all for I believe the thing will be wound up before our original three years expires any how, in fact I am reconciled to almost ~~most~~ any terms upon which I can get home. not that I am discontented in the army but that I want to see my dear nestlings and the Mother bird, and if possible to provide them a more comfortable home. I intimated in a late letter that I would like to buy the Glessner house, if the little brick [one] could be turned in as part pay. What do you think of the proposition I made you and have you spoken to Glessner about it? now I dont care anything about remaining in Cambridge [and] I would rather go to the west, but there

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are a number of things to be considered, the most important is the war.  
should that end soon, we could then go right to the west at once, but if it  
should be of long continuance it would be idle to think of it, for I couldnt  
think of leaving you away there while I would be in the army, and then I dont  
want you to spend another winter in that cold house, I want to get a property  
that will be convenient and comfortable and that can be improved to advantage.  
I think that one can be, it is convenient to Church, and would not be too far  
from the business part of town even to have my law office in the same lot.  
would'nt that be pleasant? but if you have come to the settled conclusion  
to go to the west and everything works well[,] why all right I am perfectly  
agreed. We will begin the world anew[,] I hope with a little more capital,  
and be able to start among a new community with the advantages of experience  
and take a direction that will lead us to a social position suited to our  
ambition. you know I plead guilty to a little weakness on the score of  
ambition and I think my partner is not entirely

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free from it. no matter[,] it is right, and I would'nt give much for a man  
or woman who is not. In your last letter you speak of the Major ~~being~~ looking  
so well [-] never mind Rhoda[,] when I come home again I will come differently  
from what I did before, but I am afraid my new suit is lost as I can hear nothing  
of it. Capt. Hunter came up yesterday from below and reports that the Chaplain  
had not received it. he and all the rest left there are on their way here and  
I will learn soon all about it. My horse is still there and Hunter reports  
him about well and as gay as ever. You say Mother thinks he ought to be brought

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home [-] that is just what I intend to do with him. and place him on the list of retired veterans. I am about to buy a a [sic] little sorrel mare[,] a real prancing little piece, but the Col<sup>[Lone]</sup> has got his big eyes on her and says he wants her, so I fear I will have to give her up but no matter. By the way[,] you want to know what I want Wat. to bring with him for me. I want a bridle, I wrote to him to get Bill McDonald to make me one, for fear he may not get my letter. I wish you would tell him to get me one made there, if he will have time before the expiration of his leave, he knows what kind I want. I dont think you need send those old pants [-] I have plenty of fatigue pants and I can get those when I come home. I am under obligations to Mother and yourself both for your thoughtfulness, [and] you may send two more pair of socks. Those you sent me were very nice. I only got a taste of your cherries and had to leave the balance behind. the box sent to [Captain] Hunter's company had not arrived at Chat. [sic] when he left, but little or nothing is coming through that way [and] it provokes me so, as for sending anything more by him you can use your pleasure. You know I dont want to bother people to bring things. I dont really need anything. it is true I am out of decent clothes but have enough to keep me warm and could'nt keep anything decent up here if I had it, so I want to wear out what I have this winter and begin anew in the spring in the clothing line. what I have is good enough to wallow in East Tennessee mud in. I think it so strange that you are so hoarse yet, cant you get it cured some way? I infer from your last letter that Mother's health is better. I do hope it is. I dont think your Uncle Joe Vance's regiment was with [General] Thomas' troops that were up here. I had

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no opportunity of asking about him as I saw but one Division of them and then I just passed them on the march. I heard however that they were still down about Vicksburg somewhere[.] I have no objections what ever for Mother to read my letters. I only fear she will not have a very high opinion of my ability in that line, from the specimens I am compelled to send sometimes. You spoke of sending me some chewing tobacco. I would be much obliged indeed, if you get it, get fine natural leaf[.] I would quit it, but I get so stupid and dull without it, [and] there is some very fine smoking tobacco in Knoxville. I would get some of it and send to Papa if there was ever a chance to send anything home. Did Capt. Roseman [Rosemond] call as he went through? I told the Major to take him up there, he is a very fine little fellow, good looking, has a beautiful girl in Cincinnati that he intimates he is going to marry. it was funny to hear him talk about his wound. it was a flesh wound on the posterior part of the hip. he was going to stop in Cincinnati to see his girl but [was] regretting that owing to the location of it he could'nt get his girl to dress it. I received another letter from Clark [Barnes] the other day, he says Jimmy [Barnes] is still away with a company at Sandusky but I suppose it must be a mistake[.] I was much interested in your description of Tirza's talk, her defence of her Pa &c. poor dear little thing. I wonder if she will know me when I get home? and will she be so partial then [?] it seems so funny to think I have a little daughter that can talk thus and spar about me. You dont whip her do you Ody? You seemed so much interested about me after the battle, and seem fearful that I will unnecessarily expose myself - and what I should think of my

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wife and little child &c. My dear I did think of you both even while the battle was raging and earnestly prayed that I might be spared to you while at the same time I thought I would rather have been brought home to you wounded or dead than to have come to you branded with cowardice! I think I never felt a greater sense of security at any time since I have been in this war than I did then and not the least bit frightened! Did the Chaplain write anything about me in the Times? if he did and gave me any kind of credit you will preserve it wont you darling. Did you ever get the scraps of letters I sent you from Chattanooga? if you want to preserve them I will get you a nice scrap book when I come. I have been thinking a great deal about the kind of present I will bring. one thing I want to get you is a fine parlor bound family bible. would you like it? I dont know what kind of dress goods to get, but you just get what you want at home dear and dont be afraid I will think you extravagent [-] your expenses have not been any more than I could have expected. anyhow I dont want you to deprive yourselves of anything to make you comfortable. I was very much relieved to hear of the safe arrival of my last draft and am well satisfied with your disposition of it. it was an experiment and I felt a little shaky about it. I preserved a photograph of [inverted at top of page one:] Genl. Grant and neglected to send it and got it nearly spoiled. I dont know whether it is good or not as I never saw him. - There[, ] my paper's out and the Adjutant is all out of patience. I must close without having said half that I wanted to[.]

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Trust me for the balance dear and believe me Your Own true Milton

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Tell Tirza Pa sends lots of kisses to her too. Yes and Ody too.